16:22

Series VIII, Number 7

THE MEANING OF MODERNISM

Fourth in a Series on
The Present Religious Transition

An Address Delivered
Before the First Unitarian Society of
Minneapolis, by the minister, John
H. Dietrich, on Sunday morning,
February 15th, 1925

Price Five Cents
By Mail Ten Cents

Published by
The Unitarian Laymen's League
803 LaSalle Avenue
Minneapolis, Minn.

The Minister of the First Unitarian Society of Minneapolis is granted absolute freedom of thought and speech. The Sunday morning addresses are the expression of his individual conviction, and he alone is responsible for them.

In order to meet the desires of a number of friends and members of this congregation who reside out of the city, who wish to receive copies of the published addresses, weekly bulletins, etc., the Board of Trustees has authorized the formation of a mailing list on which the names of all persons desiring to become associate members of the Society will be carried, upon the payment of $2.00 per year, or the payment of $1.00 per year, in case the addresses alone are desired. One address is published each month during the church year from September to June, or a series of eight numbers.

Additional copies of this pamphlet may be procured from the Publication Committee, 803 La Salle Avenue, Minneapolis, Minn. Price 10c each by mail, or 5c at Literature Tables at the church.

The Meaning of Modernism

Our subject this morning is the Meaning of Modernism, the fourth in the series on the Present Religious Transition. Six weeks ago I spoke to you about the General Breakup of Orthodox Christianity. At that time we took a hasty glance at the general religious condition of the world and found that the old orthodoxy was breaking down on every hand, and that the fragments, into which it is breaking, are forming themselves into all kinds of new organizations in the hope of meeting the needs and religious aspirations of the people. Then I pointed out to you the various forces which have undermined the authority and influence of the old religion, such as the new spirit of criticism, the development of science, and the growth of sympathy. Four weeks ago I spoke to you about the Decline of the Roman Catholic Church. I traced for you the history of this powerful organization, from which we learned that in spite of its apparent might and influence, its old authority has been broken, and it lives today upon its past, an outgrown and outlived institution, existing more by virtue of inertia than by virtue of any dynamic power within itself. It is a slowly dying institution, and while it may linger for a considerable time yet, it is doomed just as any other organization or system of thought, which fails to keep pace with the progress of the world, is doomed.

Two weeks ago I spoke to you about the Failure of Protestantism—a movement within Christianity itself which started some 400 years ago in the interest of freedom from the domination, the blind faith, the denial of liberty, and general inhumanity of the Catholic church. But I showed you that Protestantism failed in this, because it rebelled against the authority of the church only to assert the authority of the Christian scriptures over the minds and consciences of men as the veritable word of God; so that the freedom which it gives with one hand it takes away with the other. It frees us from the authority of an institution merely to place us in bondage to a book. Hence Protestantism in practice maintains exactly the same inhibitory influence over the free exercise of human intelligence as does the Catholic church. Not only that, but it failed to adapt itself to the new learning and the new social idealism of the time; with the practical result that, while the Reformation did clean up a few obvious abuses into which the Catholic church had fallen, it left the entire structure of mediaeval thinking untouched,

and when the creeds of Protestantism were formulated they gave expression to the same pre-scientific and mediaeval thought which constituted the theology of the Catholic church.

The Protestant Reformation proved only a false dawn, it was never carried to its logical conclusions, and so we have within the Protestant churches today another attempted reformation known as Modernism, carried on by those men within the church who believe in the original Protestant principle of private interpretation, as against "fixity of interpretation"; and so the struggle within the churches today is the same old struggle between a fixed infallible authority and a changing progressive interpretation of the creeds, the same old struggle between those who desire to maintain the status quo in religion and those who demand that the doctrines of the church must be interpreted in the light of modern knowledge, between those who accept the creeds as literally true and those who accept them as symbols of spiritual reality. It is indeed a movement to apply the principle of the Reformation—that of private judgment in matters of religion, and the attempt to adapt religion to modern needs. The only question is whether or not this attempt, this second reformation will finish the reforming job, or will merely postpone it "to a more convenient season" and lose itself again with only slight gains for religion.

Modernism is not something that has just recently appeared upon the horizon of religious thought. It has been present within the church and growing for a whole generation; but it has been brought vividly to our attention recently by the reaction against it of the so-called fundamentalists, who have grown fearful that the Modernists are about to capture control of the church. We are all more or less familiar with the general tendency toward liberalism within the church during the past generation, although we have usually spoken of it as Liberal Orthodoxy—a tendency which stands out as a striking example of the very thing I am trying to teach in this series of addresses. Modernism stands as a kind of weather vane telling us in which way the theological wind is blowing and indicating the kind of religious weather we will have tomorrow. It is preeminently one of the signs of the times in the religious world, one of the evidences of the general dissatisfaction with the old formulas of faith and the universal desire to adapt religious thoughts to religious needs.

I have just said that we are more or less familiar with the tendency in the Christian church toward a more liberal attitude within the last generation. For instance, it is only a generation ago that the left wing of the Christian

church, itself but grudgingly accorded the Christian name, cast forth Theodore Parker for his assertion that the value of the gospel of Jesus did not stand or fall with the credibility of his miraculous elements; while today the dean of the faculty of a so-called orthodox theological seminary proclaims without causing any excitement whatever: "The most conservative apologists of the traditional school confess today that miracle has lost its evidential value"; and the professor of church history in another theological school says "Miracles do not happen. The question of miracles is of relative indifference in comparison with everything else which is to be found in the gospel"; and Dr. Leighton Parks openly states from his pulpit in the most influential Episcopal church in New York that he does not believe an acceptance of the miraculous birth of Jesus essential to Christian faith, and that he himself believes that Jesus was born in accordance with the natural order of human life. Think of it—a man saying that in an orthodox pulpit and causing scarcely a ripple on the surface of the theological waters.

As a matter of religious affiliation and fellowship, it is interesting to note that some years ago a friend of mine was installed as a Dutch Reformed minister in the state of Pennsylvania. He departed from the established custom, and invited not only the other Reformed ministers, but a Unitarian minister, who happened to be a friend of his, to take part in the installation service. It caused so much commotion that measures were taken to prosecute him for heresy, and he escaped this ordeal by changing his religious fellowship and becoming a Congregationalist. But only a little while ago—note this change—when a Reformed minister was to be installed in this same city the Unitarian minister was invited to participate and nothing more happened than that two or three of the stricter churches that were invited declined to join in the service.

Perhaps the great change that has been going on is best indicated by the books written on the modern interpretation of Christian doctrines. Let us note two of these books written by the most prominent of these liberal orthodox ministers of the last generation—one called "The Kernel and the Husk" by Dr. Abbott, in which the author attempts to strip off the husk of theological doctrines that he may find the kernel of truth. And what does he strip off? He strips off the whole story of the creation of the world, the Garden of Eden and the Fall of Man; and then he clears away completely the doctrine of the Trinity; then he makes Jesus a purely human being, born like the rest of us, dying like the rest of us, the only peculiarity being that he was so completely filled

with the spirit of God that he is inclined to regard him as having been perfect—the ideal man—worthy even of worship, and to be looked upon as an authority in regard to spiritual matters, but only a man. He strips away all the miracles. He says that they are simply accretions that have grown up around the central kernel of truth. And of course he does not believe in the doctrine of eternal punishment. That, he says, is merely a relic of mediaeval superstition.

Or turn if you will to Dr. Gladden's "How much is left of the Old Doctrines?" and when you finish reading it you will find that nothing is left. The titles of his chapters are "Belief in God," in which he shows that belief in a personal God is not possible, and gives us an entirely new idea of God. Then, "How were the worlds made," and he answers by outlining the system of evolution. "What is the supernatural?" It is merely the natural which we do not understand. "What is the Bible?" It is a collection of Hebrew literature, inspired only as other literature is inspired. "Is there a personal Devil?" He answers, no, there is only a tendency toward evil. And thus he goes on to speak of the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Atonement, all the old doctrines of orthodoxy, which he shows can continue to be held only by reading into them a meaning entirely different from what they were originally intended to mean.

Bishop Greer, of the Episcopal Diocese of New York, just before he died, spoke of the remarkable progress that had been made in the improvement of Christian doctrine, and rejoiced in the fact that the barbarism of the old doctrines had been outgrown. Dr. Rainsford, also of New York, some years ago, referred to these doctrines as a hideous nightmare from which the world at last was beginning to wake. Dr. McConnell, of the same diocese, has completely repudiated the whole system of Christian theology in his recent book, entitled: "Confessions of an Old Priest"; and the faith of Dr. Grant has been well advertised during the past year. Of course the New York Diocese is an especially liberal one, composed mostly of low churchmen, that is, broad churchmen, who represent this liberal movement within the Episcopal church. In Rochester Dr. Crapsey was expelled from the Episcopal church for similar utterances a few years ago; and within the past few months Bishop Brown was condemned for heresy in Cleveland.

Fourteen years ago I was expelled from the Reformed church for refusing to believe and teach the central doctrines of orthodox Christianity in Pittsburgh. After the trial was over a prominent clergyman of the same denomination in Baltimore wrote me that it was too bad

that I happened to have settled in good old orthodox Pittsburgh. He said that I might have continued to teach my views in Baltimore, because most of the ministers in the Baltimore conference believed practically as I did. So you see heresy in these days is largely a matter of latitude and longitude. A thing that is dangerous to a man's salvation in Pittsburgh is considered essential to his salvation in Baltimore, 300 miles distant.

You are familiar with the fact that the attendants at a large number of churches boast of the liberality of their ministers and resent having the old creeds called to their attention. I refer to churches which are called orthodox. These people will come to you and say, "Our minister is almost as liberal as yours. He no longer preaches the old doctrine of Fore-ordination; he does not preach the old ideas about the Trinity; he does not preach everlasting punishment any more. He is a very liberal man." They will admit that now and then he brings out some of the old doctrines merely to let the people understand that he knows that they are still in the creed; or to satisfy some who are not content with the more humanitarian preaching; but the main gist of his preaching, they will say, is pure humanitarianism—love to God and love to man. I listened to a Methodist minister Sunday evening speak on "Lincoln's religion." He said "while Lincoln did not belong to a conventional church, he said he would join any church whose sole doctrine was love to God and love to man; and we are all travelling faster than we realize toward that kind of a church." Now, remember, I am not discussing whether or not this is the logical and proper thing for a minister in an orthodox pulpit to do. I am merely noting the fact.

Not long ago in connection with the discussion in the General Conference of Congregational churches as to the ordination vows imposed upon a young man entering the ministry, one of the best known clergymen in Boston made the statement that according to the requirements in doctrine for entering the ministry of that denomination, there was but one congregational church in Boston whose minister could qualify. In other words this clergyman in a public address made the statement that every one of the Congregational ministers of that city, except one, no longer believed the doctrines required for entrance into the ministry. And I know well from personal conversation with ministers here and there, that the number who accept the old doctrines as they are intended to be accepted are very limited. Just three days ago a prominent Congregational minister told me of having read one of my sermons which was handed him. He said, "I told this man that it was a great sermon. The man replied, 'But

Mr. Dietrich is a Unitarian'; and I said that we are all Unitarians when we are honest with ourselves." Now I have spoken of these things merely to show that this whole scheme known as orthodoxy is undergoing a very remarkable change into something unknown to the people of a generation ago and that would not be recognized by them as Christianity. We have long been familiar with this under the name of liberal orthodoxy, which of course was a misnomer, for it is neither liberal nor orthodox. But within the last year those who still believe in the literal interpretation of the Bible and the creeds have been trying to smoke these liberals out, force them into the open, and if possible push them clear out of the church; and so this thing has come to be formulated into a more or less definite type of thought known as Modernism.

They have taken this name because of the similarity of their attitude with that of the Modernist movement in the Catholic church about thirty or forty years ago; when certain great leaders in that church like Father Tyrell in England, Abbe Loisy in France, and Fogozarro in Italy dared to defy the powers of Rome by demanding that the teachings of the church be brought into closer harmony with the findings of science and Biblical scholarship. They refused to leave the church, and said, "The church is our mother; we have been born and brought up in the church, and it is because of our love for her and our interest in her success that we demand these changes." So the purpose of this original Modernist movement was reform from within, pouring new wine into the old bottles, modern ideas into the Catholic creed, to reconcile the traditional beliefs with the attitude toward life taken by educated men in the 20th century. Of course this movement was unable to gain headway in the Catholic church and was suppressed by the Roman authorities. Now these Protestant ministers are attempting to do the same thing, to rescue the Christian belief as Protestants understand it, by bringing it into harmony with the way in which educated men in this century think, and the way they look at life. The Protestant Modernists like their predecessors, do not attack the church, do not antagonize it. They intend to remain within the church, and to change its whole attitude toward life by a reinterpretation of its creeds. They seek to re-establish what they conceive to be essential Christianity by reading modern meanings into the old forms.

A group of these Modernists have recently organized themselves, and among their aims they announce this— "To maintain the right to interpret the historic expressions of our faith in accordance with the results of mod-

ern scholarship * * * to promote the adaptation of the church services to the needs of the times." Or as Dr. Leighton Parks puts it in his little book entitled, "What is Modernism?"—"to keep their church up to date, to insure the harmony of its teachings with the results of scientific research, to reconcile the use of ancient religious phrases with the views of educated people in the twentieth century; to free the church from fetters, to give its seemingly antiquated teachings new life." In other words, it means this—that in the light of science and modern criticism the old orthodox position has become untenable, and those men who have not the courage to break away entirely from the old position, or who believe that the greatest progress can be made by remaining within the church, hold on to these old doctrines, but read into them new meanings, which bring them more into harmony with science and with history.

If you study one of these Modernist ministers, you will find as I have already hinted, that he is distinguished so far as church doctrine is concerned, more for the things he does not preach than for the things he does preach. The first impression he will make upon you is one of surprise, that occupying the place he does he no longer discusses certain doctrines which have been recognized as the very heart of Christianity from the beginning. He lays his whole emphasis on morality, on trying to make men better. He is preaching for this world; he is trying to improve human life here. In other words he confines himself to the so-called practical subjects, regardless of the philosophical foundation on which men's practice must rest. He speaks of the old doctrines and our belief or disbelief in regard to certain vital questions as unimportant. He will tell you for instance, that it is not important what you believe about Jesus' birth. He is a historical fact, he says, recognize him as your spiritual and ethical leader. Of course this is a very illogical position, because it is of the utmost importance what a man believes about the birth of Jesus. Every phase of a man's life is effected by a belief or disbelief in the supernatural, and it is ridiculous to say that it is not important; but again I wish only to note the facts and not discuss them.

Now in order to understand clearly the position of these men I must take two or three of the great historical doctrines of the church and tell you what they are, and then tell you the position Modernists hold in regard to them. In doing this I feel that I know what I am talking about as I received my theological training in one of their schools, and spent the first six years of my ministry in close and constant fellowship with this group of people.

The conclusions which I shall give you are practically those taught me in the theological school and which were then held by the most eminent men of the liberal orthodox type such as Lyman Abbott and Washington Gladden, and which are now held by the more prominent Modernists, such as Harry Emerson Fosdick, Percy Stickney Grant, Dr. Faunce, and Shailer Mathews.

Let us look first at the Bible. The orthodox view of the Bible was originally the so-called view of Verbal Inspiration, which taught that the Bible was the infallible word of God, that every word in it and every punctuation point were directly inspired by God, so that it was as literally his word as though he, himself had written it. Later certain contradictions were found in the text. Surely God could not contradict himself; so the Verbal theory was changed into what is known as the Plenary theory of inspiration, the one commonly held in the orthodox Protestant world today. This teaches that the writers of the Bible may have made mistakes in the text, but they were so divinely controlled as to preclude the possibility of any mistakes in meaning, so that the Bible in every part is completely true without any mixture of error. The Bible therefore is the absolute word of God and an infallible authority in all matters. But this theory is discarded by all the Modernists. They admit that the Bible is full of errors—mistakes in history and in science; that it contains myth, legend, allegory; that it is full of misconceptions and human ways of looking at things. Of course these Modernists vary in the estimate which they place upon the Bible. Some of the more conservative teach that the Bible may be in error in regard to scientific matters and make mistakes as to historical facts, but that it is the infallible word of God in its moral and religious teaching. They cry "The Bible is a religious book, not historical or scientific." Another group does not say that the Bible is the word of God, but that it contains the word of God, although they give no rule for telling which part is the word of God and which part is not. The more radical Modernist will tell you that the Bible is not the word of God in any special sense, yet it is in some way a different book from all the others in the world, having a quality of inspiration about it that is unique, that sets it apart. Even an occasional one will tell you that it is a purely human production, like any other literary work. So you will note the remarkable advance that has been made in the last few years in regard to the theory of the Bible.

Now let us contrast the doctrine of the creed and that of the Modernist concerning the origin and nature of man. You know what the orthodox theory is—that man was

created perfect in the beginning and then fell, and that now he is at enmity with God, corrupt through and through, incapable of doing right, a rebel against God, deserving his eternal wrath, and sure to receive it unless he escapes it in one special way. But the Modernists teach nothing of this kind. They have modified the doctrine of the Fall of Man until it is only an allegory, a legend, a bit of poetry; and they accept the evolutionary origin of man. I was taught, as a student in the theological seminary, to believe in the Fall, but that it was a fall upwards. In the history of the race there came a time when man, evolving from the animal state, reached a consciousness of right and wrong. This marks the transition from animal to man. He then had forced upon him the choice of right and wrong, and he was not strong enough to choose the right, hence the fall. He fell from "perfect brute to imperfect man." So long as he had no consciousness of morality he was perfect in whatever he did, but the moment such consciousness arrived and he chose the wrong, he was imperfect. That, to my mind, is a mere quibbling with words. What they call a fall is really an advance, and why not call it by the right name. A prominent Modernist minister gives us a different interpretation, making it individual rather than racial. He says he believes in the Fall—not in any actual fall of the race, such as the Bible tells us occurred several thousand years ago; but that each one of us as we come to consciousness, wakes up to the fact that we are sinful beings, imperfect, that there is evil in us; and this is the fall—a fall occurring not to all the race at once, but occurring in the consciousness of each individual as he develops a knowledge of right and wrong. Do you think for a moment that this is what the creed means by the fall? Do you not see how utterly misleading it is for a man to face a general congregation and say to them that he believes in the Fall of Man, when this is really what he has in mind? The plain matter of fact is that he has utterly surrendered what the creeds mean when they speak of the Fall of Man, and he has put something entirely unlike it in its place.

Notice the doctrine of the Trinity and see what changes have passed over that. I need not stop to tell you the original idea of the Trinity except that it taught distinctly that God was three persons in one nature, that he contained three distinct and eternal personalities. And what do these Modernists believe concerning the Trinity. I do not risk contradiction when I say that not a single one of them believes the doctrine of the Trinity at all; I mean the Trinity as stated in the theological creeds of the churches. In place of it they talk about a three-fold

manifestation of God. In one sense God manifests himself as a father; looking at him in another way he manifests himself as a son; looking at him in a third way he manifests himself as spirit. For instance, the second part of the Trinity, the son, is only the manifestation of the divine in the sphere of our human life. There is not left one shred of the historic doctrine. In any case if that is Trinitarianism, then I am more than a Trinitarian, I believe in a manifold manifestation of God. Prof. Beckwith of the Chicago Theological Seminary, says that the Trinity means, not that God contains three persons, but "three principles—the principle of source, the principle of self-revelation, and the principle of self-communication." But it seems to me that if God is God he must contain all principles. The fact is that all this is only playing with words, and to call anything like this the doctrine of the Trinity is simply an abuse of the dictionary.

Now what do they believe in regard to Jesus and the theory of the Atonement? You know the historic idea of this doctrine. It was a belief that man was utterly lost, and that an infinite penalty must be paid. God's righteous law must be upheld by infinite suffering; and so the second person of the trinity was sent forth to be born and put to death, that those who believed in him and accepted his suffering might share in the merits of his being and be saved. But what do these Modernists believe? Jesus is only a man, according to most of them. With others he is something a little different—they hardly know what—a little more than man and a little less than God, but strictly the whole of neither. Others say he is only a man, but of course the best and noblest man that ever lived. In fact they do not believe that there are two natures—human and divine, humanity is imperfect divinity and divinity is perfect humanity. Now Jesus was a perfect man and in this sense was divine; and his work was simply the manifestation of the love of God to the race, and a revelation of the universal and eternal law of sacrifice. They say that his life teaches us that if we wish to become divine we must accept this law of sacrifice, sacrificing the lower in us always to the higher. The Atonement has come to this. The only part of the old doctrine it retains is its name.

One more doctrine will I notice, and that is the doctrine of the destiny of man. It was a logical part of the old system that those who did not accept the terms of salvation should not be saved, but should suffer for ever and ever. But this doctrine is now repudiated, even scouted as barbaric, as unworthy of God, as subversive of the very scheme of divine salvation itself, and this not

by freethinkers and rationalists, not even by Unitarians and Universalists, but by these so-called Modernist ministers who stand in the orthodox pulpits and give utterance to that which is the original doctrine.

As a specimen of the kind of transformation going on I must read you a paragraph from a book by an Episcopalian minister, who tries to state the doctrines of his church in the light of modern knowledge. He does not claim to surrender any of them, he simply remoulds them in the light of better and higher thought. It is one of the most curious and naive pieces of work I have ever seen; for there is not a single one of the doctrines that is not so modified as to modify it out of existence and leave something entirely unlike it in its place. Here is a specimen of its treatment. It touches on the nature of Jesus, but the lesson applies equally to any of the doctrines I have named. Notice these words very carefully, they are a fine specimen of Modernist thought—"When we say of Jesus 'conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried, and descended into hell'—when we say this we simply mean to declare our belief in the facts of his life, whatever they are." This is similar to me saying "I believe that this Unitarian Church is built of red granite; but when I say red granite, I simply mean to declare my belief that it is built of some material, whatever it may be."

Now I do not intend to enter into a wholesale denunciation of these men. I only wish you to understand their attitude and see the significance of it, and note it as one of the symptoms of the present religious transition. I have told you before that it is an absolutely illogical position, but it is possibly a necessary transition stage. I bring no railing accusation against these men; I do not even say they are dishonest; but seeing things as I do, I should be dishonest if I occupied such a position. And I think here before I close I must say a few words about this matter of honesty in religion. It seems to me that the very fundamental basis upon which religion must be built is intellectual integrity; and if any one desires to contribute to the progress of religion in these days he must be honest in his thought and clear in his expression of it.

And when one contemplates the thought and the expression of these Modernists he is inclined to agree with Bishop Manning, who declared that "religious teachers who play with words in the most solemn relations of life, who make their creeds mean what they were not originally intended to mean, or mentally reject a formula or belief while outwardly repeating it, cannot expect to

retain the allegiance of men who are accustomed to straight thinking and square dealing." And the ordinary man asks, "Why not drop these confusing ways of expressing what you believe? Why not say what you mean and mean what you say? Why not frankly abandon phrases that tend to confuse and mislead?" I am perfectly willing to admit the honesty of thought on the part of these men, I am willing to admit that they have convinced themselves of their right to reinterpret these phrases, that they use the ancient phrases, as they put it, to testify to their loyalty to the church fathers and to the oneness of faith with them; but granting their honesty, I insist that as public teachers, there is another obligation which they do not seem to feel—and that is clarity of statement as well as honesty of thought. I insist that tradition and sentiment in the use of ancient phrases must not be preserved at the price of confusing and misleading the people.

I hold that in the present crisis in religion two paramount requirements are made of religious teachers—one is clean-cut ideas, and the other crystal clear expression of them. Indefiniteness and blurred images are a positive hindrance to progress. In view of the mighty revolution in religion that has taken place within the last century, a religious revolution caused by the marvellous discoveries made in the fields of science and criticism, tradition and sentiment must be sacrificed to precision and clarity. And I am all the more insistent on this sacrifice because the vast majority of men and women have as yet no appreciation of the bearing of these discoveries upon religious belief. A man in private life has a right, perhaps, to make mental reservations in his use of these phrases; but a public teacher is under the highest of all obligations not only to be honest in his thought, but clear in the expression of it. If religious leaders allow themselves such mental reservations how can they expect men in the world of affairs not to follow their example? And if it be vitally important in the temple of business to be unequivocally honest, why should it not be equally important for men to have a like integrity in the temple of religion. A clergyman no doubt has a right to interpret these phrases in any way he chooses, but he should be very careful to let his congregation know the way in which he interprets them, or go where he can say what he means without confusing his hearers.

And let me take this occasion to explain something which concerns some of you. Every now and then people ask me why I have cut away so entirely from the old phraseology, why I have stopped using those old terms so full of sentiment and historic meaning. It is because

of the principle I have just now laid down as the very foundation of public teaching—the desire to leave no doubt whatever, in the minds of my hearers as to what I mean. For instance, some one says why do you repudiate the name Christian, for, as Mr. Fosdick says, "Christianity is synonymous with the best religion of which man can conceive, and simply means the living of a good moral life, that Christianity has been an evolution and in each age differed from what it was before." But I insist that there is a common thread running through all these historic variations of Christianity; namely, the belief that Jesus differed from all other beings in kind as well as in degree, and so long as a man believes that, I think he may properly be designated a Christian; but once a man ceases to believe in the essential uniqueness of Jesus, then I think he no longer deserves the name Christian.

Again I am sometimes criticised for not using the term God. Here again it is due to my especial regard for intellectual integrity. For most people the word God signifies an external, individualized, masculine, monarchical being, a heavenly Father. If, then, I should use the term to signify an internal moral urge, or an idealized and glorified humanity, or the moral ideal of infinite righteousness, then mental integrity requires that I explain in detail the very unusual meaning which I attach to the term, and this I have not time to do on every occasion. For if we are to be clarifiers and not confusers in religion; if we are to be real helpers of our fellow men at a time when clearness of statement is of unprecedented importance, then it behooves us to have our intellectual integrity include not only honesty in our thought, but also clarity in our expression of it.

Even though I am assured of the futility of Modernism because of its illogical foundation, and I deplore the fact that it adds to our present religious confusion by its lack of clarity; nevertheless I am glad to recognize it as a transition toward something better and be grateful for the advance which it promises. For I recognize it as a sign of growth. It means that the old religious life is not fixed hard and fast. It is the same kind of prophecy that we see in the spring after the snows have gone and the sun begins to get warm above our heads. The trees still look as though they had been fixed in their places, hard and fast forever. But some morning you note a little flush between you and the far-off blue sky. You can see the buds are bursting, tiny leaves are opening, and you know that the eternal life is mightier than the fixity of all forms; and that all things whether they will or not, under the impulse of the infinite force, are growing.

There is just a word that I would speak, however, if I could catch the ear of every Modernist. It is this—such terms and phrases as you use are more confusing than clarifying. They show an attempt to mix modern scientific thought with ancient theology. It cannot be done. You will find a paragraph in Bertha von Suttner's brave book, "Lay down your arms," which you men should read and re-read. She says: "We live in a time of compromise. The old institutions and the new ideas are working with equal power. And so people, who do not wish to break entirely with the old, and who cannot entirely comprehend the new, make an attempt to fuse the two together, and it is this which generates the mendacious, inconsistent, contradictory half and half system under which spirits, who thirst for truth, accuracy, and completeness, so groan and suffer." Recall the voice, said to have been heard by Moses as a command from Jehovah when he stood with his people on the brink of the Red Sea. Pharaoh behind, the impassable waters before, the people trembling and afraid, not knowing which way to go, and out of the unseen came the voice: "Speak unto this people, that they go forward."